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ABSTRACT

This third-grade unit, developed by the Public Education Religion Studies Center at Wright State University, is for all ability levels and seeks to introduce children to mythology. Objectives are to help children realize that mythology is more than just story. Rather, it is one way in which cultures explain their past. Although designed for a language arts program, the unit is interdisciplinary and can be used in the social studies classroom. Resources are limited to Greek, Roman, and American Indian mythology. However, many of the resources listed for the teacher would be useful for studying myths of different cultures. An outline of concepts, generalizations, subject matter, and vocabulary is provided. Seven cognitive objectives such as being able to define "myth" and "mythology" are listed. Sixteen initiatory, developmental, and culminating activities are described. Student and teacher evaluation suggestions are given plus student participation evaluation suggestions. Instructional resources are listed for both the teacher and the student. (Author/BC)

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AN INTRODUCTION TO MYTHOLOGY IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

prepared for
Third Grade Language Arts

by
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for the
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I. INTRODUCTION

> There is another door that can be opened by reading legends and fairy tales, and for some children, at the present time, there may be no other key to it. Religio, in one Latin sense of the word, implies a sense of the strange, the numinous, the totally Other, of what lies quite beyond human personality and cannot be found in any human relationships. This kind of "religion" is an indestructible part of the experience of many human minds, even though the temper of a secular society does not encourage it, and the whole movement of modern theology runs counter to it. In Christian "religious instruction" there is likely to be less and less religio: it may very well be in reading about a vision of the flashing-eyed Athene or the rosy-fingered Aphrodite that children first find a satisfying formulation of those queer prickings of delight, excitement and terror that they feel when they first walk by moonlight, or when it snows in May, or when, like the young Wordsworth, they have to touch a wall to make sure that it is really there. Magic is not the same as mysticism, but it may lead towards it; it is mystery "told to the children." --Elizabeth Cook, The Ordinary and the Fabulous, Cambridge University Press, London, 1969, p.5.

Throughout history there have been many things which human beings have not understood. They have often used storytelling as a method to help themselves and others understand those things of which they were unsure. Some of these stories are called myths. Myths usually are a traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serve to unfold part of the world view of a people or to explain practices, beliefs or natural phenomena. Both the study of these stories and the collective body of myths of a particular culture are called mythology.

Studying mythology helps us to understand better the people of the past. Mythology has helped preserve the history of different cultures by keeping their traditions alive. We now understand that religion and culture cannot be studied independently of one another. Thus through the study of mythology which deals with those basic questions of origin, of who we are as people, of what life is about, we also are able to understand the influence of religion upon a culture.

> Myths, then, are in part science, because like science they attempt to relate cause and effect; in part religion, since many of them seek to explain the unknown and our relationship to it, and to give patterns to ritual and worship; in part social and moral law, since ethics and morality evolve from belief. --Edna Johnson, et al. Anthology of Children's Literature, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1977, p.552.

Mythology also is an important literary form. It is both interesting and educational. Because it is interesting, young children will enjoy hearing many of the myths of different cultures. At the elementary level they may not fully understand the significance of mythology, but they can begin to realize that it is more than just a story, a type of literature. They can also understand that it is one way in which past cultures have explained why things are as they are. Although mythology is much more than just these two concepts, I think these understandings are an appropriate introduction to mythology for students at this age level. This unit is designed to be used with a third grade class of all ability levels. The unit will be incorporated into the language arts program. Depending on the time available and the depth the teacher wishes to go, the unit could cover a time span of one to three weeks.

This material is perfect for blending language arts and social studies into an interdisciplinary study. While resources listed are limited to the Greek and Romans and the American Indians, many other cultural groups could be studied. One possible way to individualize instruction would be to identify a number of myths for different peoples, for example, Norse, African or Hawaiian myths and allow students to work in small groups reading the myths and researching additional information about the culture from which the myths originated. If the class as a whole is to study myths as a group it may be better to limit study tp a few cultures to allow more depth to actually be able to see the place of myth and culture. To take the potpourri sampling approach may lead to a superficial study from which students only end up seeing the myths as mere stories like other folk tales.

II. CONTENT

A. Concepts/Generalizations:
   1. Mythology is a type of literature--usually traditional stories of an unknown origin of supposed historical events.
   2. Myths serve several different functions for a given people:
      a. they explain and preserve their past history including their origin;
      b. they explain their beliefs and practices;
      c. they explain the forces of nature; and
      d. they explain human nature.
   3. Each culture deals with the same basic themes in mythology, although each uses names and explanations unique to its own culture.

B. Subject Matter:
   1. What is mythology? (See concepts/generalizations)
   2. What are myths? (See concepts/generalizations)
   3. Why is mythology important?:
      a. because myths are interesting and entertaining as literature;
      b. because myths reveal how ancient people viewed their world;
      c. because myths preserve the history of a people; and
      d. because myths identify the basic issues of life about which human beings are concerned, regardless of culture.
   4. Where is mythology found?:
      a. in literature;
      b. in history.
   5. Areas related to mythology:
      a. legends;
      b. folk tales;
      c. epics.

C. Vocabulary:

ancient	folk tales	legends	mythology
divinities	gods	myth	supernatural beings

III. OBJECTIVES

A. Cognitive Objectives:
   Upon completion of the activities in this unit, the student will be able to:
   1. define "myth" and "mythology";
   2. demonstrate comprehension of a specific myth by drawing an illustration of a scene from a myth read in class;
   3. demonstrate his own unique interpretation of a myth by presenting a puppet show based on a myth;

4. identify literary forms which are similar in form to the mythological form;
5. demonstrate an understanding of mythology by writing and illustrating his own myth;
6. describe the value we may gain from studying mythology today.
7. utilize appropriate language arts skills in completing the written activities, i.e., proper grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc.

IV. ACTIVITIES

A. Initiatory:
1. The word "mythology" will be written on the chalkboard. Ask questions such as the following: Can anyone pronounce this word? Can anyone identify the base word in mythology? What does the base word mean? What does the word "mythology" mean?
2. A film or filmstrip of a myth will be shown to let the students see and hear an example of mythology.
3. After having seen and heard a mythology film or filmstrip, a discussion will be started with the following question: "Who can quickly tell me what this story was all about?" After discussion of the particular myth, explain that during the next few days we will be reading and hearing several different myths from different cultures. We will want to enjoy the individual stories but also to look for what the stories have in common.

B. Developmental:
1. The teacher will tell a Greek myth to the children using a flannel board. Stress that many different cultures have myths and that as we study some of the myths we will make a chart listing the country or people from which the story comes, the name of the myth, the main characters, and what the story is about, or its theme.
2. The teacher will read a variety of myths to the students. In each case the basic "data" will be collected about the myth and charted. Discussions about the individualized stories should clarify if students understand both the stories and the underlying themes.
3. Flannelboard presentations can be used both to help illustrate myths as they are read and to have students later retell about the characters or action in order to determine comprehension.
4. Students can construct a bulletin board depicting the characters from the various myths studied. Opportunities to tell about the bulletin board also will reveal comprehension.
5. Students will listen to a myth in class. They will then draw pictures illustrating their own interpretation of the myth.
6. Students will be shown books dealing with mythology. After being given time to read several of the books, children will choose any one book and develop a poster "advertising" the book for class display.
7. The student will complete the word hunt sheets which have them identify related words and characters from a given myth. Discussion of the worksheet can allow opportunity for students to verbalize the relationship between the connected words.
8. Students will be allowed to choose to research additional information about the culture of Ancient Greece or Rome or the American Indians. A variety of reporting devices can be used: written or oral reports, pictures and posters, dioramas, skits.
9. Other forms of traditional literature can be read such as epics, folk tales and legends. It is important to clarify the characteristics which distinguish these unique forms of literature.

C. Culminating:

1. Groups of students will work together and give puppet shows based on myths. Each group will choose their myth for the puppet show from a different culture. The children will design and make their own puppets. They will also design and make their own background for their puppet show.
2. Students will write a letter to a friend recommending a myth for them to read. Students will be expected to describe the myth. Emphasis in this assignment is on both ability to give a rationale for selecting a myth and on appropriate communication in written form through use of such writing skills as appropriate grammar, punctuation and spelling.
3. The students will write a myth on their own attempting to explain what is for them an unexplained event or phenomenon, using standard written English and complete sentences. Though emphasis here is on creativity and understanding, it is important to help students realize that myths for the cultures in which they functioned were not "made up" stories but were regarded as correct explanations for how things were, that is, the myths were accepted and functioned as the "truth."
4. Possible discussion questions at the end of the unit: Did you find any similarity in the myths we've read and heard? What did the myths you read tell you about the people you studied? What additional information about the peoples did you learn from your research? What were the kinds of concerns expressed in the myths we studied? Do people today still have these same concerns? Would we explain them in the same way?

V. EVALUATION

A. Student:

Evaluation of the students will be cumulative as they complete the activities throughout the unit. Particular emphasis on achieving the unit objectives will be sought in student performances in the culminating activities.

B. Pupil Participation:

1. Students will be given a check sheet to keep track of which activities they have or have not done. These will be kept by the student and the teacher will check them at intervals.
2. All students will be required to take part in the class discussions.
3. All students will be required to add something to the bulletin board.

C. Teacher:

A form will be used after each stage of the activities to evaluate the teacher. It will include the student evaluating not only the way the teacher performs but also their opinion of the activities which they will be required to do. Below are some examples of the type of statements which would be used along with "faces" to mark. Circle for response!

1. I like it when my teacher reads a story to me.

   yes not sure no

2. I like to hear myths read to me.

   yes not sure no

3. I enjoyed class today.

   yes not sure no

C. Teacher (cont'd):

4. I wrote a good myth.

yes not sure no

5. My teacher listens to my ideas.

yes not sure no

6. I can understand what my teacher says.

yes not sure no

VI. INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES*

While the sources for study of myths are numerous, this listing has been limited to two groups: the myths of Greece and Rome and the North American Indian. Many of the resources listed for the teacher would be useful for studying myths of many different cultures.

A. Teacher Resources:

Chase, Richard. Quest for Myth. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949 "The central premise of this book is that myth is literature and therefore a matter of aesthetic experience and the imagination."-Preface.

Colum, Padraic. Myths of the World. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1959. First published under the title Orpheus. A scholarly addition to the study of mythology because of the fine retelling of the myths and the valuable discussion of their significance and characteristics.

Eliade, Mircea. The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion. New York: Harper and Row, 1957. See chapter on "Sacred Time and Myths."

Frazer, Sir James George. The Golden Bough; Study in Magic and Religion. One-volume abridged edition. New York: Macmillan, 1951. In this one volume the author has expertly compressed the wealth of invaluable material contained in the original twelve-volume edition dealing with the development of magic, customs, social practices, and religion among primitive men and women.

Graves, Robert. The Greek Myths. Vols. 1 & 2. Baltimore: Penguin, 1955.

Head, James G. and Macbea, Linda. Myth and Meaning. Chicago: McDougal, Littell and Co., 1976.

Houck, Charlotte S. and Kuhn, Doris Young. Children's Literature in the Elementary School. Second edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.

Johnson, Edna, et al. Anthology of Children's Literature. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977.

Jung, Carl, et al., eds. Man and His Symbols. New York: Doubleday, 1964. See chapter on "Ancient Myths and Modern Man."

Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology. London: Hamlyn, 1959.

Leach, Maria, ed. Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of General Folklore, Mythology and Legend. 2 vols. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1949-50. The richness, vitality and range of world folklore, mythology and legend are revealed in this major reference work compiled not only for folklorists but also for the general reader.

Marriott, Alice, and Rachlin, Carol K. American Indian Mythology. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1968. Myths and legends representing more than twenty tribes, told to the authors by Indians and supplemented by the findings of anthropological studies.

Miller, James E., ed. Myth and Method. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960.

Murray, Henry A., ed. Myth and Mythmaking. Boston: Beacon, 1968. A fascinating compilation of papers from various points of view.

Ohrmann, Richard M., ed. The Making of Myth. New York: Putnam, 1962.

Schwab, Gustav. Gods & Heroes; Myths & Epics of Ancient Greece. New York: Pantheon, 1946. Written in German and translated by Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz, this is a general collection, encompassing both mythology and heroic legends. Told with simplicity and restraint, these tales provide good background for the adult who is reading other tellings for children.

Sutherland, Zena, and Arbuthnot, May Hill. The Arbuthnot Anthology of Children's Literature. Fourth edition. Glenview, Il.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1976.

Thompson, Stith, sel. Tales of the North American Indians. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971. First printed in 1929, this is an invaluable source with annotations by the noted folklore scholar; extensive bibliography.

Ullom, Judith C., comp. Folklore of the North American Indians; an Annotated Bibliography. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1969.

Zimmerman, J. E. Dictionary of Classical Mythology. New York: Harper & Row, 1964. A handy reference book that will help to explain allusions that add beauty, truth and vitality to ancient and modern literature.

B. Student Resources:

General References

Asimov, Isaac. Words from the Myths. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961. An informal discussion of the myths, pointing out the many words rooted in mythology and their use in the English language.

Bulfinch's Mythology; the Age of Fable; the Age of Chivalry; Legends of Charlemagne. New York: Crowell, 1970.

Green, Roger Lancelyn, sel. and retel. A Book of Myths. London: J.M. Dent, 1965. Myths of a variety of backgrounds: Egyptian, Babylonian, Roman, Phrygian, Persian, Scandinavian. This collection allows the reader to compare the various ways people thought of their origins and their gods.

Leach, Maria. How the People Sang the Mountain Up. New York: Viking, 1967. The author has collected legends from all over the world as answers to how-and-why questions about people, animals, earth, sea and sky. Sources and backgrounds are explained in the notes.

Tripp, Edward. Crowell's Handbook of Classical Mythology. New York: Crowell, 1970. An alphabetically arranged companion to reading, this provides information about the variants of myths, the relationships between gods and the geographical and historical background of this literature.

Zimmerman, J.E. Dictionary of Classical Mythology. New York: Harper and Row, 1964.

Greece and Rome

Barker, Carol. King Midas and the Golden Touch. New York: F. Watts, 1972. This favorite story from the Greeks is set among opulent art work and told at greater length than it usually is.

Benson, Sally. Stories of the Gods and Heroes. New York: Dial, 1940. A skillful editing of Bulfinch's Age of Fable. This is a good version for children. Illustrations harmonize with the spirit of the text.

Bulfinch, Thomas. A Book of Myths; selections from Bulfinch's Age of Fable. New York: Macmillan, 1942. The distinguished illustrations interpret the classic Greek design in a modern manner.

D'Aulaire, Ingri, and Edgar Parin. Ingri and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths. New York: Doubleday, 1962.

Farmer, Penelope. The Serpent's Teeth; the Story of Cadmus. New York: Harcourt, 1971. A myth about the founding of Thebes, retold and illustrated with dramatic effect.

_____. The Story of Persephone. New York: Morrow, 1973. A telling of the famed kidnapping and origin of the seasons myth that emphasizes the suspense and emotional qualities. The illustrations are dramatic and somewhat eerie in effect.

Gates, Doris. The Golden God; Apollo. New York: Viking, 1973. Retold by a former children's librarian, these stories from the Greek myths have been woven together to provide relationships and continuity. The experience of the storyteller who has told these myths to children appears in the clarity of the telling. See also Lord of the Sky; Zeus (1972), and The Warrior Goddess; Athena (1972).

Green, Roger Lancelyn, sel. and retel. Tales the Muses Told; Ancient Greek Myths. New York: Walck, 1965. Stories that deal with flowers, trees, birds and beasts, stars and love and friendship have been grouped together.

Guerber, Helene Adeline. Myths of Greece and Rome. Rev.ed. New York: London House, 1963. The myths are retold with special reference to literature and art. A useful reference book.

Hamilton, Edith. Mythology. Boston: Little, Brown, 1942. Scholarship and imagination vitalize the retelling of these Greek, Roman and Norse myths. Invaluable both for reference and for reading. Excellent introduction and notes.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. A Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1923. Opinions differ about Hawthorne's version of the Greek myths. A few consider them "little masterpieces of prose." Others think that he took too great a liberty with them; that he romanticized and embroidered them until the strength and vigor of the original myths were lost. Hawthorne himself states that his retellings had a Gothic and romantic touch, which was the spirit of his age.

Lines, Kathleen, ed. The Faber Book of Greek Legends. London: Faber and Faber, 1973. This is valuable to the student of children's literature for the historical survey of important children's editions of the classic myths and legends contained in the foreward. Later editions are commented on at the end of the book.

Sabin, Frances Ellis. Classical Myths That Live Today. Classical ed.: Ralph D. Magoffin. Chicago: Silver Burdett, 1958. First published in 1927, this collection shows how myths have been perpetuated in literary allusions, in art and in decorative design.

Turska, Krystyna. Pegasus. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1970. The story of Pegasus is made excitingly vivid in this large, strongly illustrated book.

North American Indian

Bell, Corydon. John Rattling-Gourd of Big Cove. New York: Macmillan, 1955. Tales of wonder, myth and legend that are the rich heritage of the famous Cherokee Indians.

Belting, Natalie. The Long-Tailed Bear and Other Indian Legends. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961. Animal legends retold from the folklore of many tribes.

Bernstein, Margery and Kobrin, Janet, retel. How the Sun Made a Promise and Kept It; a Canadian Indian Myth. New York: Scribner, 1974. A simple retelling of a creation myth.

Bird, Traveller. The Path to Snowbird Mountain; Cherokee Legends. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972. Origin stories and accounts of the Cherokee's past told by a Cherokee-Shawnee-Comanchee man.

Chafetz, Henry. Thunderbird; and Other Stories. New York: Pantheon, 1964. Three well-told American Indian myths explain thunder and lightning; how evil entered the world; and the custom of smoking the peace pipe. The illustrations are derived from Navaho sand paintings.

Curry, Jane Louise. Down from the Lonely Mountain. New York: Harcourt, 1965. Tales of unusual charm tell of the world when it was new and of the animals that helped shape it.

Fisher, Anne B. Stories California Indians Told. Emeryville, Ca.: Parnassus, 1957. Twelve how-and-why stories explain the world of nature as the Indians saw it.

Grinnell, George Bird. Blackfoot Lodge Tales. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962. Stories handed down for generations by the tribal storytellers. First published in 1892.

Harris, Christie. Once upon a Totem. New York: Atheneum, 1963. Tales of the Indians of the North Pacific Coast from Alaska to Oregon. Brief introductions throw light on Indian customs and traditions.

Hayes, William D. Indian Tales of the Desert People. New York: David McKay, 1957. Retellings of tales that have appeared in several sources.

Hillerman, Tony, retel. The Boy Who Made Dragonfly; a Zuni Myth. New York: Harper & Row, 1972. Corn maidens come to the aid of two children who were kind to them in their disguises as old beggar women, and the children become the wise progenitors and rule-givers of the Corn Priests of Zuni.

Marriott, Alice. Saynday's People: the Kiowa Indians and the Stories They Told. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963. Stories of the Kiowa Indians and information about the American Indians are combined in this reissue of two books in one volume, formerly Winter-Telling Stories and Indians on Horseback.

Matson, Emerson N. Longhouse Legends. New York: Nelson, 1968. "A few of the legends found in this collection are carved on a totem-like storypole at the Swinomish Reservation." Others were outlined for the author by Swinomish Chief Martin J. Sampson or translated by him from chants recalled by others.

Whitman, William, retel. Navaho Tales. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925. Stories of creation and magic, originally translated from the Navaho by Dr. Washington Matthews in Navaho Legends.

*Some annotated information drawn from Johnson and Kuhn, Children's Literature in the Elementary School.